

Welcome to **Fort Frederick** Heritage Preserve



This South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) Cultural Heritage Preserve is three acres in size and includes Fort Frederick (c. 1733) – the oldest surviving tabby fort in South Carolina, and the oldest known tabby structure in Beaufort County. The fort was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1974. In 1999, the site was acquired and dedicated as a Heritage Preserve by the SCDNR with funds from the Heritage Land Trust Fund and by a donation from the National Park Service’s Federal Lands to Parks Program. In 2017, the preserve was included in the Reconstruction Era National Historical Park.



The preserve is open from one hour before sunrise until one hour after sunset.



Port Royal Police Department: 1-843-986-2220
SCDNR Law Enforcement: 1-800-922-5431

Ruins of the Old Spanish Fort, Smith's plantation, Port Royal Island, near Port Royal S.C.
LOC Image / LC-DIG-stereo-1s04461



Not permitted on this preserve: climbing on Fort Frederick; hunting; the operation of motorized and non-motorized vehicles except on open maintained road and parking areas; camping; horse riding; collecting, damaging or destroying rocks, minerals, fossils, artifacts, geological formations or ecofacts; collecting, damaging or destroying plants. Other limitations apply pursuant to S.C. Code Section 50-11-2200 to -2225 and Regulation 123-203.

Violation of these regulations may result in the charge of a misdemeanor, monetary fine, restitution, imprisonment, and/or loss of privilege to enter these lands. For more information about SCDNR Public Lands Regulations please visit <https://www.dnr.sc.gov/mlands/lawregulations.html>.



Visit the SCDNR's Heritage Trust website (<http://heritagetrust.dnr.sc.gov/>) to learn more about Fort Frederick and other preserves, view documentary films, and download lesson plans and activities.



Learn more about the Reconstruction Era National Historical Park by visiting their website — <https://www.nps.gov/reer/index.htm>.

The Early History of **Fort Frederick**

Fort Frederick, more formally known as Fort Prince Frederick, was named for Frederick, Prince of Wales, the eldest son of King George II of Great Britain and Ireland. It was built by the British colonial government between 1733 and 1735 along the Beaufort River to protect Beaufort Towne from possible attacks by Spanish warships. At that time of the fort's construction, Beaufort was the Southern Frontier of British North America.

While the architect of Fort Frederick is not known and the original plans have been lost, we do know that the contracted builders were Jacob Bond and John DelaBere. Bond and DelaBere were given a partial payment of £1,600 for construction of the fort in 1734 following an examination of the fort by Robert Brewton on behalf of the South Carolina Commons House of Assembly. The total construction budget for the fort was £2,000.

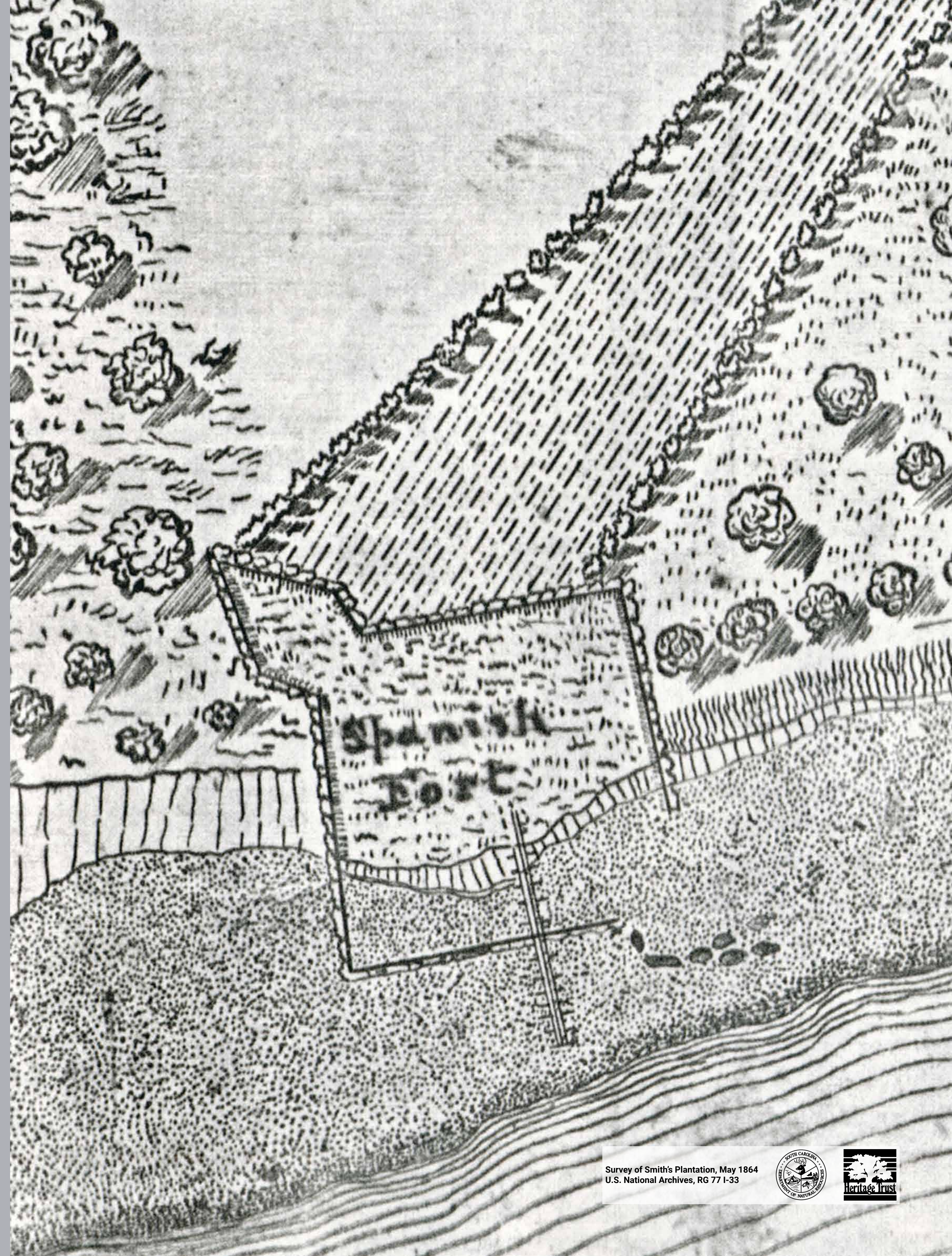
Brewton reported that he saw “a fort consisting of four lines and two bastions ... that the fort and barracks are completed according to the plan ... and that the wall is five foot high and five foot thick at the top.”

Fort Frederick also contained a magazine for powder that was described in 1739 within House records as “very leaky ... not fit (on any account) to put ammunition in.” Within this same report, the barracks were described as “leaky ... inconvenient for the sick and ailing soldiers.”

In 1740, it was stated within House records that “six men (including an officer) will be a sufficient number to take care of the fort.” The exact number of Independent Company garrisoned at Fort Frederick from year-to-year is unknown.

The fort was never tested in battle as a defensive structure during the Colonial Era. The guns were only fired in salute as ships would pass, and the tabby walls would crumble a bit with each blast. Fort Frederick was abandoned in 1757 for another tabby fort – Fort Lyttelton.

In 1785, Fort Frederick became part of a plantation. Its colonial history is assumed to have been forgotten as people called it Old Spanish Fort or Smith's Fort by the 1860s.



How to Build a Tabby Fort

Tabby was a cost-effective Colonial Era building material common along the southeastern coast. But if the ratios in the tabby recipe were not perfect, a structure might fail.

Similar in many ways to modern concrete, tabby was made by mixing oyster shells, sand, lime and water. Once mixed, the liquid tabby was poured into wooden forms that measured about 15 inches high and were tied together with metal rods. Following the Revolutionary War (1775 - 1783), forms measuring 24 inches high became common in Beaufort County. After hardening, the forms were removed, moved upwards, and the process would continue until the structure was complete.

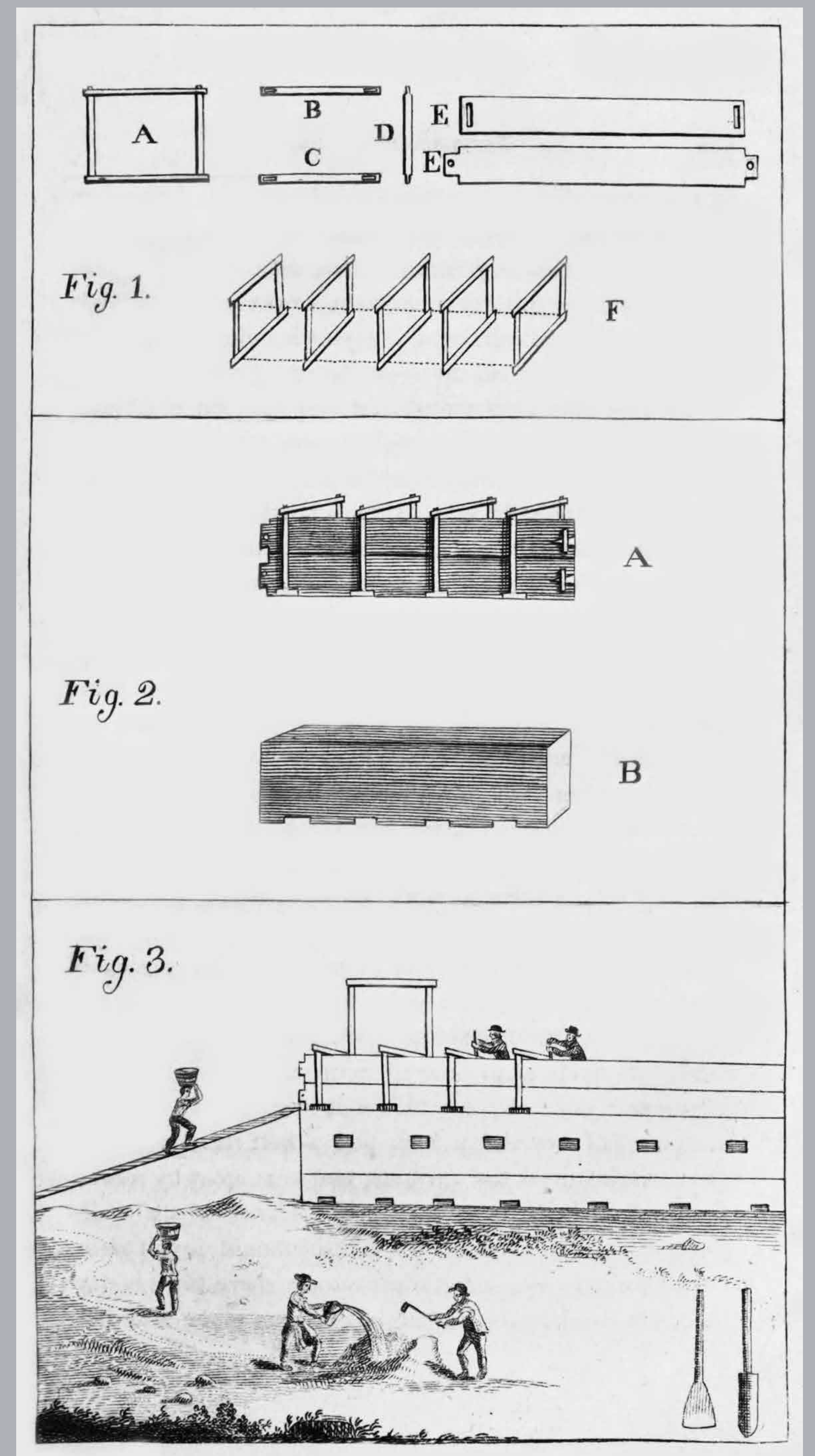
About 50,000 bushels (1,125 – 1,500 tons) of oyster shells were used in the construction of Fort Frederick (1733 – 1735). Evidence suggests that these shells were mined from shell middens built by American Indians thousands of years ago as pieces of pottery can be seen in the fort's walls.

Fort Frederick measured 130 feet by 128 feet in plan, excluding corner bastions, when it was completed. Over the centuries, the eastern half of the fort has been eroded away by the Beaufort River. Originally, the tabby walls were five feet high by five feet thick, lined with gun embrasures, with bastions on the southwest and northeast corners. Within six years, the fort needed repairs which never occurred. Fort Frederick was abandoned in 1757 for another tabby fort – Fort Lyttelton.

"I am most ashamed to answer that part of your message relating to Fort Frederick, or even give it the name of Fort. It is in judiciously situated, ill constructed and is a low wall of oyster shells which a man may leap over! And this is called a fort! But a garden fence is full as good a security. Nay, it is really worse than nothing. For the name of Fort may decoy people to retire to it in case of danger which will undoubtedly prove destructive to every one who does so, whereas by betaking themselves to their boats or to the woods they may have a chance to escape.

Forts and fortifications, Batteries and Bastions, Ramparts and Ravelings sound well; but if they are empty sounds, they will signify little. Let us therefore not amuse our selves with words, but let us take the opinion of persons of experience which of them are good and will prove a real defense in the day of danger; and let such be preserved: but let us not spend our money for what will not profit."

- Governor James Glenn, 5 May 1752
Journal of the Commons House of Assembly



Sea Island Cotton and **Old Fort Plantation**

In 1785, nearly three decades after Fort Frederick was abandoned, the fort and its surrounding land were sold to indigo planter and Revolutionary War Captain John Joyner (c. 1720 - 1796). At the time Joyner purchased the property, indigo was in decline and Sea Island cotton was taking its place as the main cash crop in South Carolina.

Upon Joyner's death in 1796, the property passed to his grandson John Joyner Smith (1790 - 1872) who was a few months shy of his sixth birthday at the time.

The property was known during the late antebellum period under many names: Old Fort, Old Fort Plantation, Smith Place and Smith's Plantation.

By 1861, Smith owned 700 acres, and according to his own records there were a total of 85 enslaved individuals living on Old Fort Plantation — 16 girls, 12 boys, 33 women and 24 men. It is likely that some of the enslaved individuals on the plantation in the early part of the 19th century were first-generation Africans due to the importation of

Africans to the Beaufort District between 1804 and 1808.

In 1863, the fort and its surrounding plantation land, as well as many other plantations on Port Royal Island were sold by the United States government (Union authorities) for the non-payment of taxes. The amount owed on Old Fort Plantation was \$93.40. The U.S. government purchased the property for \$1,000.

In 1949, part of the former plantation was developed as a U.S. Naval Hospital, which is still located next to the preserve. In 1999, Fort Frederick and three acres of surrounding land were acquired by the SCDNR Heritage Trust Program.

During SCDNR archaeological excavations in 2014 - 2015 and 2019 - 2020, the remains of at least one house was discovered. Although we do not know who lived in this house, the SCDNR Archaeology team continues to study the artifacts that were recovered, research historical records, and conduct additional analysis to shed light on the lives of all those who lived and labored here.



Port Royal Island, S.C. African Americans preparing cotton for the gin on Smith's plantation
LOC Image / LC-DIG-cwbp-00747



Footsteps to Freedom

Emancipation Day

at Fort Frederick

Fort Frederick was occupied by Union forces following the Battle of Port Royal in November 1861. It became the headquarters for the African American 1st South Carolina Regiment of Volunteers, which was renamed the 33rd United States Colored Troops in 1864.

The regiment was under the command of U.S. Brigadier General Rufus Saxton. In August 1862, Saxton was authorized to recruit up to 5,000 men for the regiment. By November 1862, Saxton had recruited 550 men, and the regiment's encampment on the former Old Fort Plantation was named Camp Saxton in his honor.

On January 1, 1863, Camp Saxton was the site of the first reading of the Emancipation Proclamation in the Southern states. Barrels of molasses and plugs of tobacco were purchased for those attending the celebration. Hundreds of loaves of bread were baked, and 12 oxen were barbecued for an estimated crowd of 5,000.

On the day of the reading, people traveled from miles around. They entered Camp Saxton from the Beaufort River by walking across a dock over the top of Fort Frederick.

Once on the site, the crowd gathered in a grove of oaks around a platform constructed for the ceremony. With the 1st SC regiment surrounding the platform, the crowd listened on as Dr. William H. Brisbane read the Emancipation Proclamation from the platform. Shortly after the reading, a freedman in the crowd began singing *My Country, 'Tis of Thee*, and was joined by other freedmen. The moment was described by Colonel Thomas W. Higginson who was in attendance as “electric.”

Fort Frederick's most important historical contribution was not as a colonial fort, but rather as the platform over which people walked toward their celebration of freedom a century later. It serves as a concrete monument and memorial to an incredible moment in American history.

